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THE MAN OF THE MOMENT.

BY SARAH GRAND, AUTHOR OF "THE HEAVENLY TWINS."

MAN is an exceedingly difficult and delicate subject to approach. If a woman have anything to say about him that is not altogether flattering, it is necessary to begin by an emphatic qualification of each assertion separately,—such as that it never did and never could apply to men generally, only to individuals; otherwise the greater number will take it to themselves and be irritated—a curious fact. The dear-old-lady-men of all ages are up in epithets directly if a type is presented without the saving clause, which, in order to prevent heartburning and bitterness, must be as cautiously worded as a legal document.

We do not think of accusing men of supposing that all women are Becky Sharps, but men think it necessary to warn us repeatedly that all men are not Roderick Randoms. When man is put out his sense of humor is suspended, and then he becomes exceedingly amusing. Many a man who read *The Heavenly Twins* would have shot the book if he had a pistol in his hand at the moment. And there is one threatening old gentleman just now who turns purple at his club, shakes his stick at the whole sex through the window, and bawls that "Women had better let men alone!" It has never occurred to this old gentleman that woman would be only too glad to let man alone if he would return the compliment.

When woman ceases to suffer degradation at the hands of man, she will be satisfied, and let him alone. But there will be no peace from now on in the human household until that happy day arrives. We are bound to defend our own sex, especially when we find them suffering injustice, injury, poverty, and disgrace, until men are manly and chivalrous enough to relieve us of the horrid necessity. There is happily nowadays an ever-increasing number of

men on whom we can rely ; but there are more who are not to be relied upon in this matter ; and if you happen to have the wrong one to deal with, of what avail is it that the right one exists ? Laws are not made because we are all criminals. But nevertheless, be careful of the saving clause ; and if you are dealing with man's morals, do not be surprised if there are complaints because you have not also mentioned his taste in dress.

The man of the moment, so called because he cannot continue unchanged on into the brighter and the better day which we are approaching, is he against whom woman has a just cause of complaint. If the modern maiden in her transition stage is an interesting person in view of the Woman Question, so also, and for the same reason, is the man of the moment. As a candidate for marriage he is the more interesting of the two perhaps, because he is not so well known. Woman is always being exhibited as maid, wife, widow, and mother-in-law ; but man for the most part is taken for granted. If there is anything to be gained by it he puffs himself out, but he comes quietly as a candidate for marriage. Least said, soonest mended. When there is any question of altering the position of women, or educating them better, the dear-old-lady-men of all ages are full of fears. They write reams to prove to each other's satisfaction that motherhood is incompatible with mathematics, and the higher education of women would lead to the physical impoverishment and final extinction of the human race. And, having relieved their minds on the subject, they devote themselves to the establishment of the schoolboard system for the teaching to death of half-starved growing children ; and the competitive examination test which is warranted to sap the nerve-power at a critical age of all who go in for it. The brains of the dear-old-lady-men appear to be divided into separate little compartments which have no communication with each other. When they come out from one of these compartments the door shuts with a spring, and then they forget what is in it until they go back again : which convenient arrangement enables them to air the most opposite theories without being conscious of any inconsistency. So we see them in terror one day because some few women are entering the professions and making an income for themselves ; this means empty nurseries, they maintain, which is something too disastrous to anticipate. They play in this compartment so long as

the interest lasts, then bang goes the door, another is opened, and they find themselves out of the region of theory into the region of fact; and now what to do with the superfluous population is the difficulty. In the midst of this a cry is heard that the physique of the race is deteriorating. Bang goes the population-difficulty door, and now there is some really beautiful talk about health and virtue. The care of the constitution is a duty which parents owe to their children, therefore women must really be made to order their lives on the most approved method. We have learnt to understand why men bawl at preaching women, and to sympathize with their exasperation when they are preached at, for do they not preach us into preaching in self-defence? We feel ourselves entitled to some little pleasure in life, so we preach back, for the preacher at least enjoys himself. It is a wise provision of nature, however, which sets man talking while woman is putting her own ideas to the test of practical experiment. She does not talk much when she means business; and he does not meddle once she settles him to cackle comfortably over his cigar about her, "don't you know, and all she is fit for, by Jove, I tell you, sir!"

During one of these phases, when the girl is being sermonized to distraction, little or nothing is said about the growing boy: his training in the matter of responsibility towards his possible children, and duty to the nation generally. Nothing used to be expected of him in the way of virtue and self-denial. It is shameful to think how he was neglected and allowed to act on his own worst impulses until the new woman came to correct him. If his education had been carefully planned to make him morally a weak-willed, inconsistent creature, and lower him altogether in our estimation, it could not have succeeded better. And that is what the modern woman complains of when the man of the moment comes as a candidate for marriage. Her ideal of a husband is a man whom she can reverence and respect from end to end of his career, especially in regard to his relations with her own sex.

Philosophers show that the stability of nations depends practically upon ethics. When they do not aspire to be as perfect as they know how to be, they collapse. As a low tone about women is a sign of a degenerated gentleman, so is it also the sign of a decaying nation. The man of the moment does anything but

aspire, and it is the low moral tone which he cultivates that threatens to enervate the race. In fact, were it not for the hard fight women will make to prevent it, there would be small hope of saving us from flickering out like all the older peoples. Woman, however, by being dissatisfied with the inferior moral qualities of her suitors, is coming to the rescue. The unerring sex-instinct informed her that a man's whole system deteriorates for want of moral principle. Feeling was her guide at first. Something about the man repelled her, and she would not have him; that was all. Now she knows. But all along there have been indications which confirmed the conclusions of her senses. One finds wise men in all ages and in many unexpected places holding as an opinion what we now accept as knowledge of the subject. Count von Moltke drew his conclusions with regard to the strength of the French army, not from its numbers, but from its condition morally. When asked, after a visit to France before the Franco-German war, what he thought Germany would have to fear in the event of an encounter with France, he answered contemptuously, "Nothing!" Because there was scarcely an officer in the French army who hadn't an indecent picture of women in his room. And something analogous has been noticed in the British service. The regiments which turn out the finest men, and do the best service on occasion, are those in which a low tone about women is voted bad form. When invitations were being sent out the other day for a great public function, there was a question as to which regiments should be asked in order to secure the best set of officers, and it was found afterwards that in every instance the regiment chosen was distinguished for the chivalrous loyalty of its tone in regard to women. In some regiments there is a by-law still in force forbidding the mention of a lady's name in mess. This is doubtless a survival of the day when a man who spoke disrespectfully of a woman was liable to be called upon to answer for the insult with his life. And, perhaps, considering the kind of conversation rife in clubs and messes of to-day, it would be well to introduce some such regulation, if it were only to save the members from making themselves ridiculous. All the worst gossip comes from these places, the silliest as well as the most slanderous. Take as an instance of both, that story which is just now causing convulsions of laughter amongst women. The ladies of

the Pioneer Club have been accused of being so exceedingly fast that men, not otherwise devoid of intelligence, have actually remonstrated with their sisters for belonging to it, and warned their friends not to "allow" their wives to go there. The club consists of women engaged in philanthropic pursuits, moral and religious, among its members being Lady Henry Somerset, Adeline Duchess of Bedford, Viscountess Harberton, Miss Willard, Lady Elizabeth Cust and three of her daughters, Mrs. Wynford Philipps, Mrs. Eva Maclaren, Mrs. Massingberd, President and Foundress, and about four hundred other women, as well known for the most part both in public and private as the Archbishop of Canterbury. This is the riotous crew whom grave and potent seniors have helped to attack, of such peculiar quality has the gentlehood of the clubs come to consist in this centre of civilization. But that it is possible for them either to be so blinded by spite or so evil minded as to have lost the wholesome sense of humor, which would have kept them from making themselves ridiculous, by asserting that there can be anything morally wrong in the conduct of such a collection of women is lamentable. Let us pray for them. There may be moral courage latent among them still; who knows? Physical courage is mere brute force; to make it a manly quality it must have moral courage to complete it. The latter argues intellectual capacity also, without which courage is an edged tool in the clumsy hands of a child. Man's own undisputed assertion used to be sufficient for himself as to the kind of conduct which would make him agreeable to women. It was he who described her as adoring "a regular dog, don't you know." Women had not asked at that time what being "a regular dog" implied. But when they became acquainted with the qualifications and improving details of the career of the creature, and found the most rascally degradation of their own sex involved in his habits, they expressed their opinion of him. "A regular dog" is not at all to the taste of the modern woman, and when he comes upon the stage expecting to find that he has wiped out the misdeeds of a life by facing the enemy for a week, and will be acknowledged as rehabilitated, she laughs at him. He has to face the enemy, of course. War is the dirty work of a nation, and he cannot expect her to do it; but even when he does it well, it is only one of the necessary qualifications that go to the making of man. What

is he like when not fighting—at home, for instance? Many a man would face a cannon who cannot deny himself a dish at dinner that disagrees with him. The dish is a daily occurrence, and women do well to remember that it is with the unreasonableness which results from it that they have to deal, waging unedifying war with it to guard their children if possible from the evil and misery of an exasperating example, long after the heroism of the cannon exploit is over.

Mere brute courage will not do at the present time. It is not peculiar to either sex. Every woman that marries risks her life, and does not expect a medal for it, either. Physical courage is a physical condition proper to healthy people, and too common to be of any account at this period of our progress without moral courage to dignify it. Without moral courage, there is no such thing as manliness. And nowadays it is difficult to read a paper without wondering where the men are. In this mismanaged world it looks as if we should soon be obliged to do their work as well as our own, or nothing will be done. We are forced forward at a cost of suffering to ourselves which probably only we ourselves can appreciate, because there are not men enough to defend the women of any class. “Where are the gentlemen?” a lady asked on her way through the hall to mount her horse the other morning. “Please, my lady,” the footman answered, “the gentlemen are in bed.” It was a country house, and only the middle-aged men were ever down at a reasonable hour in the morning. They had twice the stamina as well as twice the wit of the men-of-the-moment kind; and if a lady wanted a companion who would be up and fresh to accompany her, and would not be a bore, it was a middle-aged man she chose.

If “Where are the men?” is asked in the boudoir, the contemptuous answer is, “In mischief—or else in bed,” and it sounds like a note of national deterioration. Girls can be busy from morning till night, in doors and out. They attend to their duties and their pleasures, too; work, walk, ride, drive, and dance to-day, and come down as fresh as ever to work, walk, ride, drive, and dance to-morrow without support from any stimulant but their own good spirits, good appetites, and unimpaired digestions. But with regard to the young men, after any extra exertion, it is always the same story: “Please, my lady, the gentlemen are in bed.” And not only after extraordinary exertion. In hun-

dreds of households, wherever it is possible, it is the rule. The girls are up and doing in the morning, while the young men, indolent and nerveless, lie long in bed.

Idleness and luxury are making men flabby, and the man at the head of affairs is beginning to ask seriously if a great war might not help them to pull themselves together. It shows the unfitness of his unaided intellect for the office when he has to go back to that clumsy old method for a remedy. He would make certain to clear off the strongest men of the nation in the hope of getting rid of the weakly ones as well—an effectual arrangement on a par with the Chinese principle of roasting the pig by burning down the house. The best thing to cure men of their effeminacy would be to deprive all the idle and luxurious ones of their incomes. Give them the choice of starvation or work; either would answer the purpose.

From the modern girl's point of view, the man of the moment is not of much account. The instinct of natural selection which inclined her first of all to set him aside, for his flabbiness, is strengthened now by her knowledge of his character. She knows him much better than her parents do, and in proportion as she knows him she finds less and less reason to respect him. The girls discuss him with each other and with the younger married women, and out of their discussions is arising a strong distaste for him. "I'm not going to marry a man I can't respect," "I shan't marry unless I find a man of honor with no horrid past," and "Don't offer me the mutilated remains of a man," coupled with the names of Tom Jones and Roderick Random, are the commonest expressions of it. And it is in vain for the man of the moment when he marries to hope to conceal the consequences of the past from his wife by assuming a highly refined objection to "allowing" her to read any book that would open her eyes. The manners of the new woman are perfect. She is never aggressive, never argumentative; but she understands the art of self-defence, and reads what she pleases.

The men with whom a girl is brought up have the habit of respecting her, but it is impossible to be sure of polite consideration from any she does not know, and this sets them both at a disadvantage. The girl dare not be natural for fear of being misunderstood, and, worse still, misrepresented. She can never be sure that the apparently chivalrous gentleman with whom she

has been talking unguardedly, drawn out by his seemingly sympathetic interest, will not repeat and ridicule every ill-chosen word she has blundered upon in her efforts to express herself. The first principle of honor in social intercourse is never to repeat a private conversation ; but this is so little observed one would think it was scarcely known. To the modern girl the man of the moment, when she begins to know his habits of mind, appears as a common creature, of no ideals, deficient in breadth and depth, and only of a boundless assurance. She makes merry over him, and thinks him a subject both for contempt and pity. We are now at the swing of the pendulum in the Woman Question. Ideas are all at extremes. And it is not ideas only that are at extremes. Where woman have been unjustly treated they are inclined to retaliate, as if an eye for an eye ever mended matters ! In the nursery the little boy used to have it all his own way. He was the first to be considered, the others were "only little girls." To this tune his life was set at the outset, and he sang it himself to the end. Now, however, the pendulum swings back. In many nurseries Master Bob is no longer allowed to lord it over the little ladies. He must be taught to wait on them, and behave like a gentleman ; but, still, equality, the true ideal, is not reached. It is oftenest only the opposite of the old extreme. He is made to do the fetching and carrying and to understand also that he is altogether an inferior sort of person : "Bob's such a brute," "If you don't look after Bob, he'll over-eat himself," "You'll have to thump him if you want to make him understand," and so on from the little girls in a strain that is not good for anybody. Until he goes to school he may be loved as of old, but also ridiculed ; and when he grows up the position is unaltered. Women may like him, but they will neither fear nor respect him just because he tells them they must. When he deserves respect, the balance between the sexes will be properly adjusted. He is not yet sufficiently aware of his own imperfections to do much for himself ; but women need not be disheartened. Now is the time to cultivate a cheerful frame of mind, and remember that if there is little hope for the present generation, they can spank proper principles into the next in the nursery.

SARAH GRAND.